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AUTHOR Roth, Lane
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ABSTRACT

The film "Raiders of the Lost Ark," a timeless story about the heroic quest for a sacred object and the conflict between good and evil, employs cross-cultural, durable symbols to establish quickly a locus of motives with a large, differentiated movie audience. The archetypes of the quest and of shadow are at the core of this film; they create a mythic resonance that the audience may recognize. The film's phenomenal popularity attests to its ability to communicate rapidly to a large, heterogenous audience. Such ability suggests the presence of familiar patterns found in the traditional sources of myth. (Fourteen notes are included.) (RS)

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Raiders of the Lost Archetype:
The Quest and the Shadow

by Lane Roth

In his treatment of archetypes, Northrop Frye notes that "the poet who uses the expected associations will communicate more rapidly."[1] Frye's observation applies aptly to film. Mircea Eliade has commented on the "paradigmatic figures and images" that characterize "the cinema, that 'dream factory.'"[2] A particularly popular product of that dream factory is *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, a fast-paced film that employs cross-cultural, durable symbols to establish quickly a locus of motives with a large, differentiated movie audience.

Raiders is a timeless story about the heroic quest for a sacred object and the conflict between good and evil. The archetypes of the quest and the shadow are at the core of this film, and create a mythic resonance that the audience may recognize. This study will examine the expression of the quest and the shadow in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*'s imagery and dialog.

The Quest

As an action-adventure film, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is a romance, the generic form that Frye defines by its "major adventure," the quest (p. 187). "The favorite phrase of the myth adventure," according to Joseph Campbell, is that "once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape..., where he must survive a succession of trials."[3] C. G. Jung construes this to be

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the attempt of the conscious mind to read the unconscious, and that "from the conscious standpoint the whole process looks like an adventure or 'quest.'"[4]

Integral to the quest archetype is the journey to the Underworld. Accordingly, heroic archaeologist-adventurer Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford), nicknamed "Indy," is drawn repeatedly to caves. A South American temple, the Map Room, the Well of Souls, and a Nazi U-boat pen are all dark, subterranean, and secret locations that represent the mystery and danger of the Underworld. Entry to, and escape from, them provide challenges that test the hero.

The jungle and the desert are identified by Campbell as "regions of the unknown" found beyond the threshold (p. 79). Indiana Jones travels through both regions. His exploration of the jungle temple in South America, which begins the film, prefigures subsequent exploration in the Egyptian desert of the Map Room and the Well of Souls.

Two images of the jungle temple anticipate the Map Room. The first is an opening at the top of the cave which admits a narrow shaft of sunlight that animates some artifact, leading to a revelation about the past. In the jungle temple, the constant stream of sunlight, when interrupted, functions as a deadly burglar alarm by activating rows of spears that murderously spring together. Indiana's knowledge and cautious testing of this unobtrusive death trap safely reveal to him the gruesome fate of a former colleague. Similarly, Indiana knows that at a precise time of day, a shaft of light streaming through a hole in the roof of the underground Map Room will disclose the hidden location of the Well of Souls.

The second image is the headpiece: a unique, valuable, religious relic. The headpiece ensconced in the jungle temple is a gold statuette venerated by the local Indian savages. Indy risks his life to steal the idol. By contrast, Indy later risks his life to bring a headpiece to the Map Room. The "Headpiece to the Staff of Ra,"[5] as it is called, is a circular, bronze medallion with a crystal center. Inscriptions on both sides of the medallion designate how the headpiece is to be mounted on a wooden staff of prescribed height, which is then positioned upright in the Map Room in a matrix of holes representing an ancient calendar. A stream of sunlight shining through the crystal refracts a fine beam of light which points to the model in the Map Room corresponding to the real location of the Well of Souls.

Additionally, the jungle temple episode foreshadows the Well of Souls sequence. Both present Indy with lethal traps, corpses, a valuable prize and its subsequent loss, and burial alive. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

The jungle temple and the Well of Souls are both well protected, secret chambers. The jungle temple is rigged primarily with mechanical devices, the most spectacular of which is a colossal boulder that rolls behind Indy, threatening to crush him or seal his only exit from the cave. There are organic hazards, too, in the form of numerous tarantulas which cling to Indy's body. The Well of Souls is guarded by thousands of poisonous snakes which cover the floor. Spiders and snakes are commonly feared, and Indy's personal aversion to snakes is established as a humorous conclusion to the opening jungle sequence.

The snakes and the boulder are especially powerful images because of their archetypal significance. Eliade detects a universal religious meaning in these images, and claims that "a religious symbol conveys the message even if it is no longer *consciously* understood in every part."[6] Eliade insists on the relevance of religious archetypes to modern culture, because "even the most desacralized existence still preserves traces of a religious valorization of the world" (p. 23). The binary oppositions formlessness/form and death/life relate to images that appear in *Raiders*. Eliade writes of "the rock of the Temple that blocks its mouth, passage from the virtual to the formal, from death to life" (p. 42). Similarly, Eliade refers to "the primordial snake, symbol of...darkness, night, and death" (p. 48).

Consonant with these images of the Underworld is the shocking appearance of corpses. Indy finds the rotting remains of a former colleague impaled in the jungle temple. Later, in the Well of Souls, rows of mummies cave in on the trapped hero and heroine.

Indy braves these hazards and horrors for treasure. The gold idol in the jungle temple looks valuable; its worth assumed to be commensurate with the perils incurred acquiring it. No sooner does he escape from the jungle cave, than Indy is forced to relinquish his prize to rival archaeologist Rene Belloq (Paul Freeman). In the Well of Souls, Indy recovers the lost "Ark of the Covenant, the chest the Hebrews used to carry around the Ten Commandments in." This gold-encrusted prize, too, must be surrendered reluctantly to Belloq.

Indy narrowly eludes burial alive in the South American temple. In the Well of Souls he and heroine Marion Ravenwood (Karen Allen) are entombed by the Nazis. Indy's experience here conforms to the archetypal ordeal of the mythic hero. According to Eliade, the hero paradigmatically descends into the formless Underworld, cognate to immersion into the waters and cosmic night. Here the hero undergoes the "initiatory ritual of ordeal," which consists of struggle with and "victory over the guardian monster," and "symbolic death and resurrection" (pp. 135-136). These various motifs coalesce in the Well of Souls sequence. The Well of Souls itself is aptly named. "Souls" refers to the Underworld and the formlessness of death. The "Well," albeit utterly dry, evokes images of vertical descent and "universally disseminated aquatic symbolism."[7] Indy is lowered alone on a rope into the Well, where he must contend with darkness and thousands of poisonous snakes. After the Nazis expropriate the Ark, they hurl Marion down to join Indy, and inter them alive by sealing the only visible exit. Abandoned to the snakes and the encroaching darkness, their protective torches soon extinguished, the hero and heroine appear doomed to certain death and the Underworld. But Eliade notes that "the symbolism of the waters implies both death and rebirth" (p. 130). Indy acts quickly to break through the walls and create a new passageway to escape. He and Marion then emerge from the Well reborn, safe and triumphant (until the next episode), into the light of day.

The object of the primary quest, the Lost Ark which gives the film its name, deserves detailed treatment here. Unlike the jungle idol, icon of an

unidentified religion, the Ark is assigned a biblical reference recognizable to the principal characters and the film audience as well. The Ark represents the archetypal ultimate weapon, Pandora's box, and symbol of transcendence.

The Ark is a terrible weapon. The story of *Raiders* is set in 1936, when two American Intelligence agents commission Professor Indiana Jones to obtain the Ark before the Nazis do. Indy's university colleague Marcus Brody (Denholm Elliott) informs the Intelligence agents that, according to the Bible, the Ark is capable of "levelling mountains and laying waste to entire regions. An army which carries the Ark before it is invincible." Indy shows an antique illustration of the Ark emitting light rays that overwhelm its victims. He explains these rays vaguely as "lightning, fire, power of God, or something." The climax of the film depicts Belloq and all the Nazis destroyed by this fire when the Ark is at last opened. The image is archetypal, for Jung writes that "Yahweh's fire chastises, kills, and consumes" (p. 111).

A chest that has remained buried for over three thousand years, the Ark is a Pandora's box of mystery. It is sought by minions of Hitler, who, we are told, is "obsessed with the occult." Brody ascribes to the Ark a unique ontological status, cautioning Indy that "no one knows its secrets. It's like nothing you've ever gone after before." But Indy scoffs at "the boogeyman" and "magic, a lot of hocus-pocus," classifying the Ark squarely in the phenomenal world as a find of "historical significance." The ceremonial opening of the Pandora's box is a revelation of the noumenal which expunges all the witnesses. Only Indy and Marion are spared, because they shut their eyes to the

revelation. Indy's insistence that they avoid looking implies that he has acquired faith in "hocus-pocus" through premonitory knowledge of a metaphysical nature. In his case, *not* seeing is believing.

The Ark is a manifestation of the sacred. Sallah (John Rhys-Davies), the Egyptian digger, warns his friend Indy that the Ark "is something man was not meant to disturb...It is not of this earth." Belloq fervidly tries to persuade Indy that "it's a transmitter; it's a radio for speaking to God." Belloq's verbal metaphor, while fitting in its reference to something outside the spatiotemporal manifold, is time-bound in its 1930's radio imagery. By contrast, the visual images chosen by the filmmakers to signify the idea of transcendence are archetypal. The Ark has been opened on a remote mountain located on a small island. Following a grisly montage sequence of the Nazis perishing from exposure to the Ark's rays, we see an extreme longshot of the island and its mountain peak, from which a column of smoke rises vertically toward a hole in the stormy sky.

This shot is a synthesis of various motifs interpreted by Eliade. The island is"one of the paradigmatic images of creation,"[8] and the surrounding waters, we have seen, combine the polarities of life and death. The mountain expresses "communication with heaven" (p. 37). The sky reveals the presence of the supreme God through "the majesty...of the celestial immensity, the terror...of the storm" (p. 121). The pillar connecting both mountain and sky is yet another image of communication between earth and heaven. Finally, the

hole in the sky is the "upper opening that makes passage to another world possible. (p. 174).

The Shadow

The shadow is an archetype, detected by Jung, that represents "the dark side of our nature."[9] Jung's student, Frieda Fordham, defines the shadow as "all those uncivilized desires and emotions that are incompatible with social standards and our ideal personality, all that we are ashamed of, all that we do not want to know about ourselves."[10] In *Raiders* the hero's shadow is manifested through wardrobe, makeup, props, and lighting. Additionally, it is personified by the characters of Belloq and the Nazis.

Indiana Jones is seen in dual makeup and wardrobe to match his double life. As a "professor of archaeology, expert on the occult," he is clean-shaven, wears eyeglasses, and is nattily dressed in a three-piece suit with tie. As an adventurous hero and "obtainer of rare antiquities," his face is unshaven, sweaty, and without glasses. His work clothes consist of a rumpled shirt with open collar, covered by an open, black leather jacket. Dusty brown trousers, boots and a hat complete the trademark costume that Indy wears through most of the film. Whereas he may resemble the traditional hero astride a white horse, galloping alone in pursuit of a Nazi motor convoy, in closeup shots his unshaven face and dark hat recall the unheroic paranoid portrayed by Humphrey Bogart in *The Treasure of The Sierra Madre* (1948). Indiana is capable of assuming additional identities which are related to his trips to the Underworld. He masquerades as an Arab to stealthily visit the Map Room, and

disguises himself in a stolen German uniform to escape the U-boat pen undetected.

Accessory to Indy's trademark costume is his bullwhip. This is an unusual prop that the hero employs with versatility throughout the film. When not in use, it is coiled and attached to Indy's clothing. The serpentine appearance of the whip suggests the sinister side of its owner. During the battle with the snakes in the Well of Souls sequence, Marion mistakes the coiled whip for a snake and attacks it with her torch, singeing Indy.

The snakes are living props that signify the hero's shadow. Indiana's revulsion toward snakes represents his rejection of his shadow, which is, like the whip, a part of him. A striking two-shot of a cobra and Indiana, seen when he completes his descent into the Well of Souls, is a visual statement of this opposition. Both framed in closeup, momentarily and tensely frozen, the hero and the serpent of evil stare each other in the face, like mirror images in the archetypal confrontation of the ego and the shadow.

Shadows created by cinematic lighting signify the instinctual "dark side" of the hero. Indy's face is revealed for the very first time when he emerges from the shadows of the jungle, stepping toward the illuminated foreground of the shot. Immediately before, still cloaked in shadow, he had lashed out his bullwhip to disarm a treacherous native guide. Indy's hidden self is capable not only of sudden violence but of illicit sex. This, too, is associated visually with a shadow. Indy's initial entrance into Marion's bar in Nepal is a two-shot composed of Marion and an over-sized shadow of Indy. From their

conversation we understand that ten years ago, Indy had seduced and abandoned Marion, who was then "a child" and "in love."

The shadow archetype is also expressed in *Raiders* through characters who are distinct from the hero, yet of the same sex. This is consonant with the personification of the shadow in dreams and myths.[11] Jung writes that in dreams, a "doubling of the shadow" may occur, "where the two halves appear as different or even as antagonistic figures."[12] This configuration is found in *Raiders* so that Indy's shadow is embodied by a male individual, Belloq, and a male group, the Nazis.

Belloq, like Indiana Jones, is a dedicated archaeologist. Both professionals are attracted to the same prizes, the jungle temple headpiece and the Lost Ark. Both men are attracted to Marion, the film's only female. Belloq explicitly recognizes his role as the hero's shadow, telling Indy candidly, "I am a shadowy reflection of you, and it would take only a nudge to make you like me, to push you out of the light." Indy resents this, but cannot deny it, replying only, "Now you're getting nasty." Belloq concludes, "You know it's true. How nice."

This conversation takes place in a Cairo bar, both men seated at a table. In a two-shot, facing each other, the two adversaries contrast visually. Indiana wears a wrinkled, open-collar shirt with rolled-up shirtsleeves. Belloq is neatly attired in a suit with a necktie. Indy is perspired and needs a shave. Belloq is dry and clean-shaven. Most vivid is the reversal of traditional iconography associated with hats, for it is the hero whose hat is dark and dirty, whereas the villain's hat is white and immaculate.

Belloq captures Indy's treasures by force, and vaunts that "there is nothing you can possess which I cannot take away." First he steals the South American temple headpiece. Later he takes temporary possession of Marion and the Ark.

Belloq's existence as the hero's shadow is ultimately destroyed by divine light. Unlike Indy, who closes his eyes to the Ark's revelations, Belloq experiences the mysterious contents with eyes fixed open to witness madly the Ark's lightning bolts which incinerate all the Nazis and finally explode Belloq's head.

Belloq's temporary successes are owning to his business relationships with large, male groups, whereas Indy associates with personal friends like Brody. Marion, and Sallah. Belloq is first seen as the employer of a South American jungle tribe, which prefigures his subsequent employment by the Nazis. The jungle warriors, like the desert soldiers, dress uniformly and are armed. The groups differ in degrees of social organization and technological development.[13] The Nazis occupy much more screen time, and are instantly recognizable as the "bad guys." Hitler may be, after all, the ultimate twentieth-century shadow image. Steven Spielberg, director of the film, emphasizes that "the villains in *Raiders* are arch."[14]

The "doubling of the shadow" is dramatized by the tension between the Nazis and Belloq. The Nazis, who include types ranging from a Peter Lorre impersonation to a hulking boxer, are generally sadistic, brutal thugs. In character they diverge from Belloq, who is genial, urbane, and romantic.

Further, he is French, not German. Yet it is unclear who is exploiting whom. And when Sallah informs Indy that Belloq is the "one brain among" the Germans in Cairo, he mispronounces the name "Belloche," so that it rhymes with *Boche*, a traditional French insult for the Germans.

The study has demonstrated how the quest and the shadow archetypes inform *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The film's phenomenal popularity attests to its ability to communicate rapidly to a large, heterogeneous audience. Such ability suggests the presence of familiar patterns found, as we have seen, in the traditional sources of myth.

Whether most film audience members can articulate this correlation is a question for empirical research. Conscious awareness of archetypes is, of course, not the same as spontaneous reaction to them. Campbell asserts that "it will always be the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story that we find" underlying myths, fairy tales, and literature (p. 3). Extending Campbell's contention to film, we find that Indiana Jones is a movie incarnation of the universal mythic hero with a quest to challenge him and a shadow to confront.

Notes

[1]Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism Four Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 103.

[2]Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harvest-Harcourt, 1959), p.205.

[3]Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p. 97.

[4]C. G. Jung, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), p. 100.

[5]This and subsequent quotations not cited are transcriptions of the film's dialog.

[6]Eliade, p. 129. Orig. emph.

[7]Eliade, p. 135.

[8]Eliade, p. 130. It is interesting to note that *Raiders* itself was conceived on an island. Steven Spielberg, director of the film, claims that George Lucas, executive producer first proposed the idea for the film to him in Hawaii. See: Steven Spielberg, "The Idea," in *Raiders of the Lost Ark Collector's Album: Movie Special 81-2*, ed. Ann Holler (New York: George Fenmore Associates, 1981), p. 7. This information appears also in Paramount Pictures' official presskit, 1981, p. 9.

[9]Carl G. Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Laurel-Dell, 1968), p. 73.

[10]Frieda Fordham, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology*, 34d ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 50.

[11]M. L. von Franz, "The Process of Individuation," in Jung's *Man and His Symbols*, pp. 174-175.

[12]C. G. Jung, "The Ambivalence of the Fish Symbol," *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, Vol. 9, Part 2, in *The Collected Works of C.*

G. Jung, trans. R. F. C. Hull, ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler (New York: Pantheon, 1960), p. 120.

[13]This distinction is, as well as the next point, ignored by Pauline Kael in an unfavorable review which concludes that George Lucas is "hooked on the crap of his childhood." See: "The Current Cinema: Whipped," *The New Yorker*, 15 June 1981, p. 134.

[14]Michael Sragow, "*Raiders of the Lost Ark*: The Ultimate Saturday Matinee," *Rolling Stone*, 25 June 1981, p. 24. Quoting Steven Spielberg, orig. emph.